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**COALITION WARFARE VERSUS FRANCE, 1792-1815**

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## USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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### COALITION WARFARE VERSUS FRANCE, 1792-1815

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## ABSTRACT

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Coalition warfare adds another element of friction to the already unpredictable and chaotic art of war. Tension can develop between coalition members as they are forced to compromise on various ends-ways-means issues. Obtaining consensus on political goals is difficult. The disparate interests and capabilities of the coalition members aggravate the development of a coherent coalition strategy. Exasperating matters further is their ad-hoc nature; nations that lack experience with each other occasionally find it necessary to form a coalition of expediency to meet a current threat. This study explores the many challenges of coalition warfare. The period of revolutionary and imperial France is the vehicle utilized to explore those challenges. Building and nurturing a strong political foundation is the primary element of coalition warfare. The principal task of strategic leaders involved in coalition warfare is to anticipate and overcome the many obstacles to coalition political unity and cooperation.

## THESIS

The first four coalitions that formed against revolutionary and Napoleonic France suffered fatal weaknesses. They had difficulty agreeing to common policy goals. Goals of certain members often conflicted sharply with those of other members. Divergent goals often led to divergent strategies that hindered the coalitions more than they hindered France. Resolve was often lacking due to the limited nature of their goals, mutual mistrust, and pursuit of other interests, a sure recipe for failure considering French military power and political resolve. Lacking all of the major powers of Europe in a coalition at the same time was another serious weakness. The root cause of these deficiencies was the negligence of allied strategic leaders to nurture a solid political foundation for their coalitions. With this critical element missing, military failure was preordained.

The Fifth Coalition succeeded because it corrected those faults. It contained as active participants all of the major powers of Europe - Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia - for the first time. These powers agreed to the absolute need to subdue France and committed themselves to achieving that goal. Their coherent military strategy was made feasible by their large and well trained armies that could confront French armies and win. Reaching agreement on a complete set of specific goals was difficult and occasionally threatened coalition unity. However, exhaustive efforts by key political strategic leaders ensured that the coalition rested on a firm political foundation in order to maintain unity and cooperation. They anticipated and overcame the political obstacles that had caused earlier coalitions to fail militarily. Ultimate military success was made possible by the coalition's strong political foundation.

Coalitions add another element of friction to the already unpredictable and chaotic art

of war. Tension develops between each member as compromise becomes necessary over various ends-ways-means issues. Reaching agreement on political policy goals can be a major challenge. Developing and aggressively executing coalition strategy can also be daunting tasks. Coalitions, unlike formal alliances, tend to be a short term linkage of two or more nations to meet a current threat. Common doctrine, interoperable equipment, planning, and a host of other necessities are therefore less well developed than in long term alliances. The principal task of strategic leaders involved in coalition warfare is to anticipate and overcome these challenges.

## THE WARS BEGIN

King Frederick William II of Prussia was the first to see war with revolutionary France as a means to expand his territory and influence. In September 1790 he proposed to Austria's Leopold II that they intervene to restore King Louis XVI to power. Frederick William's motive was a desire to gain the duchies of Berg and Julich for his efforts while Austria could gain other compensations.<sup>1</sup>

Leopold II eventually saw several possible advantages from such a scheme. He believed that an alliance with Prussia would serve the three-fold purpose of offsetting a possible Prussian and Russian alliance aimed at Austria, limit future Russian gains in Poland, and that restoring King Louis XVI to an unencumbered throne would make him dependent on Austria.<sup>2</sup> In a classic example of 18th century power politics Leopold II would thus ". . . be able to employ France as a counter to Prussia in the west while using Prussia to preserve Poland and check Russia in the east."<sup>3</sup>

Leopold began threatening France with war in the summer of 1791 but hoped to achieve his objectives while avoiding actual hostilities. He realized that war might destroy France's monarchy altogether and place Prussia in a position to actually demand compensations for her efforts. Leopold's death in March 1792 along with Russia's untimely intervention in Poland derailed Austria's strategy of diplomacy and threats of war to peacefully achieve her goals.

Poland's unsettled fate became a major distraction. Leopold's successor, Francis II, worried that Russia would gain too much in Poland forcing Prussia to demand more German provinces at Austria's expense. Prussia feared the loss of her hoped-for Polish gains to Russia

and was unhappy with the extent of Austria's German desires. Consumed with Poland, Francis II and Frederick William II never reached agreement on their war aims - the all important compensations from the war with France - either before or during the war itself. Additionally, due to mutual mistrust and concern over Poland, Austria and Prussia retained close to 75% of their forces at home when they ultimately invaded France.<sup>4</sup>

The war itself seemed little more than a sideshow. France was actually the first to declare war in April of 1792 due to the belligerent threats that Leopold II began making in 1791 and the even more antagonistic attitude of his successor, Francis II. Untrained and disorganized French forces invaded Belgium in late April, suffered setbacks and quickly retreated. Austria and Prussia launched their belated and under-strength offensive in August. Ragged French forces amazingly won a minor yet politically decisive victory at Valmy in eastern France on 20 September.

Coalition unity became more strained as Frederick William II quickly entered into talks with French officials as a means to leverage Austria to agree to his Polish demands. Frederick William threatened withdrawal of half of his army if Francis II refused.<sup>5</sup> Growing mistrust, lack of purpose, and lack of unity within the coalition during 1792 contrasted sharply with even the minimal levels achieved by France. By late 1792 victorious French armies had overrun Belgium, the Rhineland, and the Sardinian provinces of Nice and Savoy, and had annexed these territories into the French Republic by March of 1793.

Maintaining coalition unity was not a priority of either Frederick William or Francis. Both held ulterior motives which counterbalanced their feeble efforts against France. Neither sovereign was interested in basing their coalition upon a stable political foundation. Mutual

mistrust, lack of resolve, and failure to agree on a common policy doomed their efforts. Additionally, they became so involved with their own concerns that they failed to realize that the French had a will of their own and might just launch the war themselves in response to Austria and Prussia's threats. The Austrians and Prussians also neglected to reevaluate the situation as changes occurred. War with France became meaningless once Russia had invaded Poland. Poland's unsettled partition consumed the allies' attention making it impossible for them to develop an agreeable policy for their war with France.

Events and the drift toward war moved quickly during the late winter and spring of 1792 and illustrate the momentum and "life of its own" tendency that war and rumors of war can take on. In the end, the abortive Austrian and Prussian effort witnessed a brief intermission but not the end of the war with the upstart republic. France's growth and the beheading of King Louis XVI in January 1793 angered other powers who soon entered the conflict, forming the First Coalition.

## THE FIRST COALITION

England was concerned with the Austrian-Prussian war with France but had initially remained neutral because its vital interests were not threatened. That soon changed when France appeared to threaten Holland. Holland's vast and strategically located waterways had long been a vital interest to Great Britain.<sup>6</sup> The English realized that northern France's small and shallow harbors could not support a fleet large enough to mount a serious threat to the British Isles.<sup>7</sup> French control of the vital Dutch waterways was an altogether different matter. Tensions heightened. Diplomatic moves and bellicose rhetoric followed. France declared war on England and Holland in February 1793.

England, Holland, Sardinia, Naples, Tuscany, Parma, Venice, Modena, Spain, and Portugal soon joined the crumbling Austrian and Prussian coalition.<sup>8</sup> Russia was nominally a member also but was consumed with consolidating her power in Poland.<sup>9</sup> The First Coalition was very impressive even without Russian assistance. France was isolated and faced vast military threats from every direction of the compass.

Battles raged between France and the Goliath-like First Coalition across western Europe and even the West Indies from May 1793 until April 1797. France amazingly survived again and shattered the coalition. Napoleon Bonaparte gained prominence by helping a teetering French government put-down an internal revolt in October 1795<sup>10</sup> and then by defeating Austrian armies in Italy. In desperation the French overhauled their governmental decision making process creating the Committee of Public Safety. The committee streamlined France's war making ability and introduced the truly revolutionary concept of the *levee en masse*. Every aspect of French society was organized to meet the

external threat.<sup>11</sup> French armies grew from 360,000 ill-equipped and poorly trained men in early 1793 to 850,000 well equipped, highly motivated, and tactically innovative men formed into flexible and hard-hitting brigades and divisions by the fall of 1794.<sup>12</sup> France prepared for total war. The *levee en masse* was resisted by European monarchs unwilling to foster unwanted social and political reforms at home.

The coalition's limited war policy centered on the territorial compensations that each partner would gain. Austria and Prussia were again unhappy with the result of the compensation negotiations. Allied military strategy called for several large formations to invade France from Spain, the Italian states, the Rhineland, and Holland. Discord and distractions soon permeated the coalition. Austria and Prussia were still overly preoccupied with Poland's fate while Russia was too engrossed in erasing Poland instead of sending troops to France.<sup>13</sup>

England suffered an ends-ways-means problem embarking on far-flung expeditions to the West Indies, Gibraltar, the Mediterranean Sea, Flanders, Brittany, Poitou, and Dunkirk without ranking goals or considering means. The British indulged in their traditional strategy of attacking peripheral objectives such as French colonies in the West Indies instead of massing forces on the continent.<sup>14</sup> King George III lamented that "the misfortune of our situation is that we have too many objectives to attend to, and our force consequently must be too weak at each place."<sup>15</sup> Lord Auckland, an important member of the British Board of Trade, saw the problem more clearly when he pointed out "that our first objective should be Paris, and that victory there would lead to the acquisition of the French West Indies, while diversions of force from the main effort might risk the fate of the whole war."<sup>16</sup>

Prussia and Austria hindered more than helped their new allies. Frederick William II at first insisted that he would not employ his forces fully in the upcoming 1793 campaign until Austria recognized the results of the Russo-Prussian 1792 partition of Poland.<sup>17</sup> Frederick William eventually became so concerned with events in Poland that he returned to Berlin announcing that Prussia would not participate in additional campaigns without a British subsidy.<sup>18</sup> Still not finished, Frederick William further unhinged the coalition by telling his generals ". . . to avoid large-scale actions against the French."<sup>19</sup> Poland was more important to Prussia than the war with France.

Francis II secretly adjusted his war aims by deciding to seize Alsace and Lorraine and then exchange them for Bavaria: a modification to Austria's age-old desire to exchange Belgium for Bavaria.<sup>20</sup> He failed to mention this to his allies. More significantly, Austria entered into talks with Russia in order to split the Russo-Prussian alliance concerning Poland.<sup>21</sup> Fate, in the form of a doomed Polish rebellion in the winter of 1794 and Russia's desire to again expand southward against the Ottoman Empire, rewarded Austria. Austria was viewed by Russia as a more beneficial ally than Prussia for its upcoming Turkish venture and thus entered into a treaty with Austria that resulted in the Third Partition of Poland in 1795. Poland was divided between Russia and Austria while Prussia was left with only a small portion which included Warsaw. Frederick William became so incensed that he sought a separate peace with France.

This stunning turn of events doomed the already fragile coalition. Prussia, which had contributed little since mid 1793, now became little more than a neutral state. Austria's victory in Poland would prove to be merely pyrrhic. The 60,000 troops that Austria diverted

to Poland may have paid greater dividends had they been used against France.<sup>22</sup>

The allies experienced the severe challenges of coalition warfare. Little effort was expended to strengthen the coalition's political foundation or foster cooperation. Their failure was therefore predictable. "Never, indeed, has there been a league so imposing yet so hollow."<sup>23</sup> All parties were not satisfied with the coalition's negotiated policy goals, Austria in particular. Austria willingly deceived her allies by secretly adjusting her own goals during the war. At a minimum this would have caused problems in any post-war settlement talks had the allies actually won the war. Prussia's unwillingness to contribute even marginally to the coalition's efforts from mid 1793 onward illustrated where her real interests were and explain her lack of resolve in prosecuting the war with France. England attempted to fight everywhere without considering her limited means. All of these problems stemmed directly from a weak and uncoordinated political foundation.

Allied mistrust and lack of cooperation contrasted sharply with the French. France organized for total war. The spirit and motivation of the French armies overwhelmed the slow moving, uncoordinated, and uninspired armies of the coalition. As an Austrian diplomat observed: "On the side of the enemy one sees only audacity, energy, celerity, resolution, redoubtable firmness, 800,000 men destined for combat . . . On the side of the coalition powers one sees neither co-operation, nor accord, nor sufficient means. . ."<sup>24</sup>

## THE SECOND COALITION

While the rest of Europe stewed over French ascendancy in early 1798 the two remaining antagonists searched for ways to batter each other. Neither had the ability to strike the other directly. A fateful decision by the French to attempt an indirect assault on England provided the spark that ignited another coalition.

Napoleon led an expedition to Egypt in the spring of 1798 in order to threaten England's colony in India. Disaster soon struck the French when British Admiral Horatio Nelson sailed into the Egyptian harbor of Aboukir and destroyed Napoleon's accompanying fleet in August. Britain's tactical victory opened the door for other powers to openly defy France. Interestingly, the first to join in an alliance was Russia and her historic enemy, the Ottoman Empire. Both had traditionally considered the Mideast to be in their sphere of influence and were greatly distressed by French encroachment into this area. Great Britain and Austria joined these two powers to form the Second Coalition by early 1799. Prussia's neutrality was a critical coalition weakness.

Battles again raged across Europe and the Mideast from mid 1798 until early 1801. France should have been crushed. That she was not can be attributed to the fruits of her own revolution in military affairs and lack of cooperation within the Second Coalition.

Beginning in mid 1793 France created an army that was vastly different from the traditional ancient regime armies of its foes. The *Levee en masse* produced not only large armies but highly spirited ones organized into fast moving and hard-hitting combined arms formations. French command and control became far better than her enemies' due to the evolution of a highly trained staff corps which prepared operational plans, disseminated

orders, and was responsible for intelligence collection.<sup>25</sup> French commanders were normally younger, more aggressive, smarter, and more flexible than their enemy counterparts.<sup>26</sup> Lowering class barriers to higher rank allowed promotion based on merit rather than birth, opening the doors for many talented soldiers.

French tactics evolved quickly from the traditional stiff linear formations into more flexible columns screened by swarming skirmishers. Operational and tactical speed, flexibility, and initiative became hallmarks of French forces. Their opponents' ancient regime armies moved slower, lacked initiative, and retained parade ground tactics that were often impossible to execute in war.<sup>27</sup> Napoleon soon perfected France's already strong artillery and his employment of semi-independent combined arms army corps further distanced France from her foes. The culmination of France's revolution in military affairs can be found in Napoleon himself. His extraordinary military skills elevated the art of war to new levels. A few enlightened souls within the coalitions' ranks attempted to learn from and emulate France but progress was slow. It would take several more defeats before they began to adopt the needed changes.<sup>28</sup>

Allied military shortcomings were augmented by their failure to solidify the coalition's political foundation. Little political energy was devoted to this critical area. Pursuit of national vice coalition interests doomed their efforts. Nations will not knowingly act counter to their national interests. However, compromise is often necessary within a coalition. If unwilling to compromise, critical thought should be given to the wisdom of entering the war. Failure to build and foster political unity was the root cause of the coalition's ruin.

A reasonable strategy that concentrated a decisive blow aimed for the heart was not

developed. Allied strategy called for a three-prong attack: in the north a British and Russian thrust from Holland, in the center an Austrian and Russian thrust through southern Germany, and from further south, a second Austrian and Russian thrust across northern Italy.

A more concentrated attack by the combined Austrian and Russian forces across southern Germany and then through central France would have been a better military strategy. It was not adopted primarily because of the allies' shortsighted insistence to fight in the areas where they ultimately wanted to gain influence. England desired to end French control of Holland and Belgium. Austria wanted to expand in both Italy and southern Germany.<sup>29</sup> Francis II would once again disrupt coalition unity by secretly adjusting his goals, in mid battle no less, by deciding to grab Alsace and Lorraine. Russia wanted to restore the integrity of the disposed regimes in Italy and Switzerland in order to limit Austrian gains.<sup>30</sup>

A key element of the original strategy called for the reduction of the strategically located French forces in Switzerland by the central and southern thrusts prior to their entry into France. These two wings were in position to reduce the French salient by the late summer of 1799. But at this critical time Austria diverted all of her forces from the central wing northwest toward Alsace and Lorraine in order to achieve her new secret policy. Austria also induced the Russian forces of the southern wing to attack north into Switzerland on their own. Austria's goal was to bottle up the Russians in Switzerland in order to limit the complications of reasserting Austrian dominance in Italy and to gain Alsace and Lorraine.<sup>31</sup> Disaster soon followed. French forces in Switzerland quickly defeated in detail first the deserted Russian corps of the central wing and then the approaching Russian corps of the southern wing. Russian Tsar Paul I quit the coalition in disgust at Austria's selfishness.<sup>32</sup>

Minor efforts had been made by British and Russian diplomats beforehand to persuade Austria to follow the coalition's original strategy. They failed because Austria no longer saw a need for her allies. Allied victory seemed assured as French forces had suffered reverses in Italy and southern Germany. Coalition dynamics changed as unity no longer seemed necessary. The lack of a solid political foundation prevented the weakly-held-together allies from convincing unruly Austria that her interests were better served by cooperating with her allies.

The coalition had divided its forces into three non-mutually supporting wings and then had to suffer Austria's selfish and strategically bankrupt decision to adopt its own strategy. In contrast France conducted an economy of force action in Holland, concentrated on and defeated the separated Russian corps in Switzerland, and then concentrated on and defeated the allies in Holland. Napoleon returned from Egypt, became First Consul through a coup, and then defeated Austria's armies in Italy and Germany. The Second Coalition was finished. But expansive France had again failed to win a peace acceptable to Europe.

## THE THIRD COALITION

Fears of continental hegemony rose in Europe as Napoleon crowned himself Napoleon I, Emperor of the French, in December 1804 and then annexed Genoa in the spring of 1805.<sup>33</sup> Tsar Alexander I, concerned that Napoleon's growing influence in Italy posed a threat to Russian interests in the Balkans, joined the British in forming the Third Coalition in April 1805.<sup>34</sup> Naples, Sweden, and Austria joined by September. Prussia timidly remained neutral, even after receiving an ultimatum to either join the alliance or face war against it.<sup>35</sup>

Coalition policy was to reduce France to her 1791 frontiers and erect a series of barrier states in Holland and Italy. Their disjointed military strategy neither identified nor concentrated on any critical target. A combined Austro-Russian force was to link up in Bavaria and then attack into eastern France.<sup>36</sup> Austria's main army was to invade northern Italy. Diversionary attacks were to be launched in Hanover and the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>37</sup>

Napoleon defeated the isolated Austrians in Bavaria through incredible strategic and operational speed and maneuver at Ulm in October before the Russians linked up with the Austrians.<sup>38</sup> Poor staff work between Russia and Austria partly accounted for the delayed link up. The Austrians astonishingly failed to account for the ten day difference between the Austrian and Russian calendars.<sup>39</sup> This was but one of many examples throughout this period of coalition members suffering strategic and operational problems due to a lack of experience with each other. Napoleon immediately followed with his stunning defeat of the Austro-Russian forces in the Battle of Austerlitz in early December 1805. Unwilling to fight on, the allies suffered a first round knock out.

## THE FOURTH COALITION

The British province of Hanover became the spark that ignited the Fourth Coalition. Napoleon coerced Prussia into closing her ports to English commerce, and occupying and then annexing Hanover by early 1806.<sup>40</sup> The reluctant Prussians had become, in effect, unwilling allies of the hated French. Napoleon then quickly double-crossed his new ally by offering to return Hanover to England in an effort to obtain peace with the British.<sup>41</sup> This was too much for Frederick William III.

It is well to remember that the conniving Frederick William II hatched the first plan to wage war with revolutionary France back in 1790. He did little to assist his Austrian ally in their feeble war in 1792, and then hindered more than helped the First Coalition as he sulked over his losses in Poland. His weak-willed son refused to enter the Second and Third Coalitions because he feared France and yet worried that allied success would only strengthen Austria and Russia at Prussian expense.<sup>42</sup> But by mid 1806, having finally been pushed too far by Napoleon, Frederick William III incredibly picked the worst time of all to fight. Austria was unwilling to help and Russian forces were too far away to assist soon enough.

In mid October Napoleon decimated the Prussian army at Jena and Auerstadt and pursued the fleeing Frederick William along with the remnants of his shattered army deep into eastern Prussia. Cold weather, French exhaustion, and the arrival of a Russian army finally halted operations after the indecisive winter battle of Eylau on 7 February, 1807. Spring brought better campaigning weather and Napoleon's decisive defeat of the Russo-Prussian forces in the battle of Friedland. Tsar Alexander I accepted a lenient peace following the battle, became a French ally, and dreamed that he and Napoleon would divide

Europe among themselves. Defiant Great Britain remained at war with France.

Inadequate military strategy combined with strategic and operational sluggishness greatly hampered the Third and Fourth Coalitions. The allies leisurely deployed their armies toward territories they wished to gain instead of concentrating on the Grand Army. England compounded this error by again pursuing useless peripheral objectives in Egypt, Sicily, Brazil, India<sup>43</sup> and Turkey.<sup>44</sup> Napoleon's strategic and operational speed combined with his ability to identify and concentrate on a critical vulnerability obliterated allied plans before they ever got off the ground. Coalition building, campaign planning, and force deployments require time. Napoleon was not an accommodating enemy in this regard, especially for thrown-together coalitions.

Unity and perseverance were again absent. Clemens von Metternich vainly argued that ". . . Napoleon's seeming omnipotence was but the reflection of the disunity of his opponents. . ."<sup>45</sup> And that Austria's recent defeat at Ulm in October 1805 ". . . be frankly avowed, but that it serve as the moral basis for a renewed effort."<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, the importance of strengthening coalition unity and resolve was still not recognized as the true path to victory.

Strong motives energized France since national survival depended on military success. Similar energy was lacking in her enemies due to their limited goals. Clausewitz, a participant of these wars, would later write that "Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow."<sup>47</sup> Adherence to this sound logic helps explain the lack of resolve in the early coalitions.

## THE FIFTH COALITION

Napoleon chose an economic strategy to strangle Great Britain since he was unable to challenge her navy. Napoleon's continental system attempted to prevent England from exporting goods into Europe while European states could still export their goods into England. The premise was that the unfavorable trade imbalance would eventually force England to accept peace on French terms.<sup>48</sup> Napoleon badgered his allies and satellites to support his continental system. Along the way he needlessly embroiled himself in a costly and unwinable guerrilla war in Spain, planting the first seeds for the Fifth Coalition.

England was not beaten by the continental system. In fact, British exports rose between 1806 and 1816.<sup>49</sup> Other outlets for British exports, France's war in Spain beginning in 1808, and the Tsar's growing disenchantment with France in 1811 offered needed reprieves to the British.<sup>50</sup> It was Napoleon who would fall, and his fall began in Spain.

Unhappy with Spain's inefficiency and doubting her loyalty to his Empire, Napoleon maneuvered his brother Joseph onto the Spanish throne in May of 1808.<sup>51</sup> The unforeseen revolt that this inspired became an incurable ulcer for France<sup>52</sup> and was the first in a string of events that led to Napoleon's downfall. Napoleon determined to lead an army into Spain to crush the rebellion. But first he met with Alexander in September 1808 at Erfurt to ensure that an eye was kept on Austria.

The meeting did not go well for Napoleon. Alexander uncharacteristically held firm. Napoleon found the Tsar ". . . defiant and unspeakably obstinate. . . He wanted to treat with me as between equals."<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, the Tsar's backbone was stiffened by advice received from none other than Napoleon's ex-Foreign Minister, Charles Talleyrand.<sup>54</sup> Talleyrand and

others inside France worried that Napoleon was overstretching France and needlessly disrupting European peace by his endless conquests. Austria saw Napoleon's internal disharmony and complications in Spain as an opportunity to entangle France in a two front war, which she did in the spring of 1809.

Spain proved to be unwinable in the end. Unable to meet French forces on an equal footing, the Spanish soon resorted to a vicious and highly successful guerrilla warfare strategy. England committed a land army on the Iberian Peninsula that under the future Duke of Wellington learned how to confront and defeat Napoleon's regulars.<sup>55</sup> Napoleon was able to defeat Austria but their battles that raged between April and July of 1809 provided further proof that Napoleon's legions were no longer the crack storm troopers of 1805.<sup>56</sup>

More significantly, relations between Napoleon and Alexander continued to sour. Alexander disliked France's growing influence in Poland. Napoleon seemed unwilling to give Alexander the free hand in Turkey that he had expected. Compliance with the continental system hurt Russia financially.<sup>57</sup> Alexander eventually refused to openly support Napoleon's economic warfare against England. Napoleon responded predictably.

Napoleon's disastrous retreat from Russia in 1812 led directly to the formation of the Fifth Coalition. Prussia joined the Russians in March 1813 and Sweden soon followed. England, who had been successfully fighting the French in Spain, reached an agreement with Russia in June. Austria joined the coalition in August. Finally, after twenty years of almost continual war, all of the major powers of Europe were aligned together against France.

Coalition policy was tortuously crafted over several months. Differing national goals managed to stress allied unity even after twenty years of conflict with France. Recognition of

the primary need to defeat France initially served as the linchpin of coalition unity. Allied unity and resolve had for once been achieved with relative ease due to the supreme threat that Napoleon represented. However, key questions remained unresolved until early 1814 concerning a number of territorial sovereignty issues, how severely France should be weakened, and whether Napoleon should be replaced and if so by whom? Differences over these issues eventually strained coalition unity as military victory seemed more certain, causing the Tsar in particular to see less need for his allies. The rapidly changing military situation created tension within the coalition as certain members began to adjust their goals. Coalitions are not static, interests and goals may change as the situation improves or deteriorates. Significantly, allied unity prevailed because others had finally come to identify coalition unity as a cardinal principle.

British Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh viewed allied unity superseding all but the most basic British interests.<sup>58</sup> Metternich argued that ". . . the requirement of unity outweighs all other considerations."<sup>59</sup> Both men successfully labored to convince their allies and even their own governments of the primacy of maintaining coalition unity and cooperation. Without their Herculean efforts to build and nurture its solid political foundation it is quite likely that this coalition would have splintered and failed as had its predecessors. Coalition unity had been the allied center of gravity throughout this period. The Fifth Coalition succeeded primarily because key strategic leaders anticipated and overcame the many obstacles of coalition unity, thereby strengthening the source of their power.

A reasonable military strategy was developed that for once concentrated on Napoleon's armies instead of insignificant territories. Large and well trained allied armies made their

military strategy feasible. They had learned hard lessons, improved their tactics and instituted organizational reforms.<sup>60</sup> They also cleverly decided to seek battles with Napoleon's detached corps and avoid battles with Napoleon himself. Only after wearing down the French would they seek and risk a decisive battle with Napoleon.<sup>61</sup>

British subsidies and logistic support greatly added to the coalition's strength. England had provided funds and equipment to her allies throughout this period. By mid 1813 these efforts began to pay dividends as her partners finally united in a real coalition that was determined to master France. England indeed was the arsenal of monarchy.

Allied strength contrasted favorably with a decline in French power. Much of the aura of invincibility that surrounded Napoleon was gone. French armies had already suffered defeats in Portugal, Spain, and the cataclysmic disaster in Russia. War and constant conquest had lost their appeal inside France, the populace wanted peace. Napoleon found it increasingly difficult to man the ranks of his Grand Army.

Most significantly, the allies stuck together throughout the many months and difficult battles that followed. The allies had learned by 1813 that they had to work together, could not let themselves be split by Napoleon, and that none of their individual goals were achievable until Napoleon was defeated. A critical test of unity was passed when they successfully overcame a political crisis in February 1814. Alexander believed that he saw an opportunity to individually settle the war and enforce his own policy goals on France. His allies convinced him that this was unacceptable. Alexander relented and continued on as a loyal ally.<sup>62</sup> The allies closed ranks and together defeated Napoleon. Lesser crises had doomed earlier coalitions that had lacked a solid political foundation.

## THE PEACE

Considering the incompetence of its predecessors the Fifth Coalition's military achievements were rather remarkable. But perhaps more remarkable was the peace that the allies agreed to after Napoleon fell. Legitimacy, stability, European equilibrium, and relative satisfaction, rather than ill will, conquest, and intimidation were achieved.

Agreement was not reached easily, however. Allied diplomats had often conferred and argued even while the battles of 1813 and 1814 raged across western Europe. The heated post-war talks that began in September 1814 in Vienna lasted over six months and were rudely interrupted by Napoleon's escape from Elba. Deadlocks occurred often, especially over Poland and parts of Germany. War even became a possibility as Prussia and Russia faced a coalition of Austria, England, and France over Saxony's fate.<sup>63</sup> Failure to agree to specific policy goals stressed the allies during the conflict and complicated the peace settlement talks held following the conflict.

Unity and reason ultimately prevailed. A peace that was acceptable to the major powers was eventually obtained. Various liberal factions and nationalists were not totally satisfied as evidenced by the crises that occurred in the years that followed.<sup>64</sup> But it cannot be ignored that Europe entered into a period of relative calm that lasted for almost 100 years. The victorious allies dealt leniently with vanquished France and gave her a place at the peace table. Initial Russian and Prussian demands in Poland and Saxony softened and were eventually resolved through negotiation. A cooperative concert among the five major powers - Russia, England, Austria, Prussia, and France - was recognized as more important than forcing an unacceptable peace that would shortly lead to further hostilities.

## CONCLUSION

Coalition warfare is often the only viable method of achieving political goals through military means. The potential gains in military strength can, however, be negated by political discord between coalition members. Achieving coalition military synergy is dependent upon building a strong coalition political foundation. The principal task of strategic leaders involved in coalition warfare is to anticipate and overcome the many obstacles to coalition political unity and cooperation. Joining a coalition admits to necessity. The necessity may include increasing military power as well as improving public support and legitimacy. The sum of the coalition members' force structures does not automatically equate to actual military power but only to potential military power. The level of real military power actually achieved, as well as the level of public support and legitimacy, depends upon how strongly the coalition's political foundation is built.

Allied inattention to fostering a solid political foundation was the root cause of weakness within the early coalitions and preordained their military failures. The dynamics of cohesive coalition building were ignored in lieu of pursuit of solely national interests. Coalition building and maintenance were not recognized as the primary tasks of strategic leaders within the early coalitions.

Divergent interests hindered the formulation of acceptable coalition goals. Military strategy development was often hamstrung by the members' conflicting goals. Perseverance was also shamefully wanting in the early coalitions. Mutual mistrust and the unwillingness of all of the major powers to unite against France seriously weakened the early coalitions. All of these shortcomings stemmed from the same root, a weak coalition political foundation.

The Fifth Coalition succeeded because it finally put all of the ingredients together. Exhaustive efforts were made to solidify the coalition's political foundation. Rifts that began to threaten coalition cohesion were quickly and aggressively attacked by key political strategic leaders who recognized the primacy of maintaining unity. They perceived that their most significant duty was to preserve the coalition. Shifts in the military situation created internal tensions as political goals began to expand. These pressures were anticipated and preempted from achieving their destructive affects on coalition unity. The allies' foremost achievement was overcoming the obstacles to erecting and maintaining an effective coalition.

Strengthening and protecting their true source of power made military victory possible.

The peace that the allies obtained emphasized legitimacy, European equilibrium, and generally satisfied not only the victors but even vanquished France. They developed a concert of Europe that resulted in almost 100 years of relative peace in Europe.



## ENDNOTES

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